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ABSTRACT

Arizona has compiled one of the most dismal records in the country for addressing children's needs. For example, at the time of this report, the state ranked last in state support of early childhood education and graduated fewer high school students than 47 other states. Hopeful signs of citizens' concern have recently been found in results of a telephone poll of 618 randomly selected registered voters. Findings revealed surprising depth of support for increased funding for children's services and education and substantial backing for elected officials who advocate more money for children's programs, even if the programs require an increase in taxes. Interpreting the results of the poll as a mandate for action on behalf of Arizona's children, the Children's Action Alliance launched a comprehensive, multi-year effort on three fronts: a public education campaign, a mobilization of supporters' efforts, and a policymakers' and lawmakers' campaign. Issues on the agenda include maternal and child health care, early childhood education, abused and neglected children, homelessness and housing, and poverty. (RH)

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IT IS TIME FOR LISA...

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CHILDREN'S ACTION ALLIANCE

The Children's Action Alliance (CAA), established in March 1988, is Arizona's largest, statewide, non-profit organization working on behalf of children and families. CAA provides a strong and effective voice for children through research, advocacy, education and public policy development.

The Arizona Children's Campaign, sponsored by Children's Action Alliance, the Arizona Community Foundation and the Washington D.C. based Children's Defense Fund, is a comprehensive effort designed to educate and alert policy makers and the public to critical children's issues.

"In twenty years, children born today will either be working for us, living with us, or shooting at us."
--Marian Wright Edelman
Founder and President of the Children's Defense Fund

WHO IS LISA?

Lisa is ...

the child whose problems began before birth because her mother had no prenatal care.

the child lying sleepless and crying in the car that is her home.

the child who encountered problems early in kindergarten because she had no preschool education.

the child growing up poor and malnourished, her chance for success seriously undermined.

the child abused and neglected by her family and society.

Lisa is Arizona's future.

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TODAY ' S CRIMINAL IS YESTERDAY ' S FORGOTTEN CHILD

When policy makers talk about the crime epidemic they like to tell you they're solving it by building more prisons. In fact, Arizona locks up more children than 48 other states at an annual cost of $30,000 per bed.

However, we know in most cases, crime is merely a symptom of a disease called neglect. Studies and experience prove that the longer the wounds of neglect — poverty, despair, dependency and failure — are allowed to fester, the more costly the remedy will be.

Early intervention and prevention programs are a bargain compared to the price tag for child abuse, drug addiction, school dropouts, teen parents, measles outbreaks, mental illness, welfare payments and prisons down the line.

Currently, most programs available to vulnerable children and families in Arizona provide help only after the problem has become a crisis. By then it is often too late for successful intervention and always more costly to the child and society.

ARIZONA IS A BAD PLACE FOR A GOOD START

For too long, Arizona's children have been told to wait. Children who cannot vote, lobby, or speak out for themselves have had their lives put on hold while other priorities took precedent with policy makers.

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While Arizona's children waited, our state compiled one of the most dismal records in the country for addressing children's needs.

Arizona currently ranks: (1 = Best 50 = Worst)

- 50TH in state support of early childhood education
- 48TH in juvenile incarceration
- 48TH in expenditures for mental and behavioral health services
- 48TH in high school graduation rates
- 47TH in the percent of births with no early prenatal care
- 38TH in the percent of births to teenage mothers
- 37TH in teenage unemployment
- 37TH in aid to families with dependent children
- 33RD in the percent of children living in poverty

The facts speak for themselves. Arizona is not the place for a good start.

ARIZONANS CARE AND ARE READY TO ACT

Arizonans are deeply concerned about their children. They understand that investing in children today will pay big dividends in the future and they appear willing to back up their concerns with votes and tax dollars. How do we know that? Because we asked them.

Extensive research was recently completed. The first ever comprehensive look at public attitudes on children's issues ever compiled in Arizona.

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Commissioned by the Children's Action Alliance, conducted by the Behavior Research Center of Phoenix and independently reviewed by The Insight Group and Wright Consulting, the poll reveals strong public support for giving children the right start.

The support is broad-based and cuts across gender, age, ideological and party lines. It displays unanimity among Republicans, Democrats and Independents in their readiness to support politicians who have a strong children's plank in their platform.

The results demonstrate surprising depth of support for increased funding for children's services and education as well as substantial backing for elected officials who advocate more money for children's programs. EVEN IF IT MEANS A TAX INCREASE.

The poll also displays the public's perception of a lack of leadership on children's issues and the need for corporations to accept a larger role in supporting children's programs.

The findings in the research are based on phone interviews with 618 registered voters chosen by strict random sample around the state.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Arizonans want more funding for services to help poor children:

71% support an increase in state funding on services to help needy children and infants

Arizonans are concerned about the status of children:

64% believe the proportion of children living in poverty has increased in the last five years

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Arizonans have a strong message for politicians:

73% do not think political leaders are doing enough to help solve children's problems

74% would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports increased spending for children's programs, even if it meant a tax increase

Arizonans know it's pay now or pay later:

74% believe failure to invest in children's programs now will mean a higher cost later for job training, welfare and prisons

83% believe ensuring children a good education, quality child care and good health care early in life helps prevent drug abuse and crime later

Arizonans want more from state government for children:

66% say state government should do more to help poor children

61% believe no one in state government is showing real leadership on children's issues

63% believe government should guarantee all Arizona children adequate health care and medical services

84% believe government should guarantee all Arizona children protection from abuse and neglect

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76% support an increase in state spending for education

Arizonans are looking to corporations for leadership:

74% say corporations need to take a leadership role in providing funding for children's programs

Arizonans support a wide range of children's programs:

91% want more services for abused and neglected children

89% want the quality of public education improved and the dropout rate reduced

85% want necessary health care provided to low income children

84% want additional services for homeless children

79% want nutritional food provided to mothers and children who need it

75% want prenatal care services provided to mothers and children who need it

74% want help for low income parents to pay for child care

59% want preschool education programs like Headstart for all four-year old children

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MANDATE FOR ACTION

The Children's Action Alliance interprets the results of the poll as a mandate for action on behalf of Arizona's children.

To accomplish our goals we have launched The Arizona Children's Campaign. This project is a comprehensive, multi-year effort sponsored by The Children's Action Alliance, the Arizona Community Foundation and the Washington D.C. based Children's Defense Fund.

The campaign is targeted to three fronts: A public education campaign, a mobilization of supporter's efforts, and a policy and lawmaker's campaign.

The issues on our agenda are:

Maternal and child health care
Early childhood education
Abused and neglected children
Homelessness and housing
Poverty

We're ready to move forward to make sure the best programs are adopted, the money is well spent, and each program is evaluated after implementation.

DON 'T REPEAT HISTORY, MAKE IT

For generations we instilled in our children a belief in the American Dream. A life built on basic freedoms, responsibilities and opportunities for all. Now that dream is in jeopardy.

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We have a historic opportunity to make the 1990's THE CHILDREN'S DECADE and reverse the cycle of disadvantage that threatens our very future.

Every voter and elected official, every volunteer and worker, every corporate head and small business owner, every parent and policy maker must confront the question: HOW MANY YOUNG, POTENTIALLY PRODUCTIVE LIVES WILL BE SACRIFICED BEFORE WE DO WHAT IS NECESSARY ... AND RIGHT?

There are no more excuses. We have the knowledge we need, we know the programs that work and, most important, we have the support of the people of Arizona.

It is time for Lisa . . Now!

"The nation cannot compete and prosper in the global arena when more than one-fifth of our children live in poverty and a third grow up in ignorance. If we continue to squander the talents of millions of our children, America will become a nation of limited human potential. America must become a land of opportunity — for every child.
...The Council for Economic Development

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